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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio talk by Mr. W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through Station WRC and 34 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, April 22, 1930.

Water plays a very important part in crop production, especially in the case of vegetables, most of which are shallow-rooted and suffer when there is a shortage of moisture in the soil. Some of you who live in the irrigated sections of the West know that irrigation water is the very life of your crops, because you cannot depend upon the clouds for your supply. Sometimes here in the East the clouds give our crops more water than they need and that is the other extreme. There is a happy medium, however, and there are times when many of you fruit and vegetable growers would give a good deal if you could call up the Weather Bureau and just order a nice shower. I am sure our genial weather man would be only too glad to send the shower were it in his power to do so.

Many of our eastern gardeners have solved the problem for themselves by installing an overhead or sprinkler system of applying water to their growing crops during periods of insufficient rainfall. It costs all the way from \$250 to \$500 an acre to install a system of this kind, but it sometimes pays for itself in a single season, in fact, some means of applying water to a crop during dry periods is really good crop insurance. By the overhead or sprinkler system of watering crops, lines of pipes are placed on posts high enough so that a horse can pass under them. At one end the pipes are connected to a main pipe which is either on top or under the ground, this pipe connecting to the pump or main water supply. At intervals of every 3 feet along the overhead pipes, holes are drilled and little brass nozzles are inserted. The distributing pipes are so arranged that they may be rotated so that the little streams of water issuing from the nozzles may be directed over a strip 25 to 35 feet wide on both sides of the lines of pipes. Water is pumped from a pond or stream, or is obtained from some city water system. This system of watering is the nearest approach we have to natural rainfall, and gardeners in many sections are finding its use almost indispensable especially on high-priced land, and for growing high-priced crops. "Spray Irrigation in the Eastern States," is the title of Farmers' Bulletin 1-5-2-9, which gives full information on how to install an overhead irrigation system.

The small gardener can secure lines of portable spray pipe, which are connected by unions, and which can be attached to the house water-system by means of an ordinary garden hose. These portable lines may be easily moved from one place to another. On many farms there are water systems from which the garden might be irrigated and kept growing during the dry periods of the summer.

The time is not far distant when growers of canning tomatoes for the canneries will be setting their plants in the fields. That leads me to remind those of you who are planting tomatoes this year, that it is important to secure good plants for planting, also that much depends upon the way you get your plants started in the field. My experience has been that poor plants are pretty sure to result in a poor crop, and that good plants are the first essential for a good crop. The same thing applies to

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cabbage or any other transplanted crop. Much depends upon the way the plants are handled, and I have seen the chances for a good crop absolutely ruined by the way the plants were put into the ground. Watch the experienced gardener set plants and observe how he firms the soil about the roots of each plant, and how careful he is that the plants do not dry out from careless handling.

A small amount of water about the roots of each plant when it is set will work wonders in giving the plant a start. Try it when you set tomato or cabbage plants in your own garden and see if it does not pay. In certain experiments conducted with sweet potatoes, the addition of a pint of water around each plant more than doubled the yield, as compared with the same number of plants that were handled in exactly the same manner, except that no water was used in setting them. A tablespoonful of nitrate of soda to each 3 gallons of water used for "watering in" the plants will also give them a quick start. Plants are very much like a group of boys running a race, the ones that get a good start always seem to keep ahead. When I plant a crop, I want good seed, better plants, and then use the best methods of handling them.

In view of the fact that trueness to variety type and strain of the seed used by tomato growers has such an important bearing upon the earliness, yield, quality, freedom from disease, and uniformity of the crop, no pains should be spared in obtaining the best seed, and the cost of such seed should be of secondary consideration. Only about 2 ounces of tomato seed is required to produce plants for an acre, so you can well afford to pay a fair price provided you get the quality you are paying for. In no case should miscellaneous canning-factory seed be used. Certain of the canners are, however, growing special crops from pedigreed stock seed and are saving this seed separately and supplying it to their contract growers.

A number of seed growers and seedsmen in the United States are making a specialty of superior strains of tomato seed, and are now supplying growers of early tomatoes. In some cases growers are selecting and saving their own seed with marked success, but as a rule, seed growers who are producing selected seed under personal supervision are in position to supply you with seed of a more uniform strain than you can grow yourself. Groups of early tomato growers are in some instances contracting in advance with seed growers to grow super-standard seed for their use. This method is giving good results and where all of the growers of a locality plant the same strain of seed a more uniform product is obtained, making it easier to establish grades.